

Do Not Fear; Be Strong; Your God Will Come Before Long

Isaiah 35:4-7 • 2021-09-12



Imagine you arrive back at your home today only to find it is all in flames. One of your neighbors comes to you and says, "Don't worry, I called the fire department as soon as I saw the smoke. They are on their way." When you see the flames, you realize that you can do little to nothing on your own. You wait. "Don't worry, the fire fighters will be here soon to help," your neighbors assure you. You wait. "Are they coming?" you keep asking your neighbors. You are surprised to hear someone nearby respond, "I don't know." Full of fear and you begin to feel weak and completely helpless. Soon no one is encouraging you. Do we ever find ourselves feeling this way about God and his saving rescue? Sometimes we might feel like that person waiting for help from God. We might feel weak and wonder when the help will come. At other times we might be that neighbor standing by who is no longer offering words of encouragement and hope. We sometimes don't know what to say to someone's plight. And we are silent. Today we look at Isaiah 35 and hear God's instruction to speak up when we see someone with a fearful heart so that God's Word removes all their hopelessness and all their fears.

Of course, we know that God is always with us and is all-powerful to save. We have many promises in his Word which give us comfort far greater than any earthly rescue squad. Psalm 146 reminds us, "*Do not put your trust in princes, in mortal men, who cannot save. When their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing. Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God, the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them— the Lord, who remains faithful forever.*" Unlike all other sources of help our God is the all-powerful creator, his plans are always carried out. This comfort should fill the heart of all of believers.

But that's not always the case with believers. Fear and hopelessness filled a lot of hearts in Isaiah's time. The homes of many were in Israel were burnt and destroyed. The nation of Assyria had ruined their cities and lands. In 722 BC the northern nation of Israel fell into Assyrian hands. And Isaiah spoke of the coming destruction which the southern kingdom, Judah, would also face. All the cities surrounding Jerusalem were under the threat of attack. Many were already destroyed. And the Assyrians were not friendly conquerors! Their reputation prompted terror. They demanded heavy tribute and brutally punished all who put up any resistance. It seemed like Jerusalem didn't have much time left. Twenty years after the northern kingdom of Israel was destroyed, a vast army of Assyrians surrounded Jerusalem. If these weren't enough fears already, Isaiah also spoke of the coming of the Babylonians who would surely conquer Jerusalem. The people who first heard Isaiah's Words were surrounded by troubles. They were full of fear. "Will God's rescue come? Will he come to save us?"

We too can find ourselves in situations which fill our hearts with fear. We may not have yet faced conquering armies, but we are not free from earthly troubles and pains. Our bodies, ever so fragile, are just one doctor's visit away from the news, "You have only this long to live" or "You may lose you vision," or "The cancer is spreading too fast." Most of us may not have to fight battles, but we are daily just an instant away from a car wreck that can scar anyone as much as a soldier on the battlefield -both mentally and physically. And if we ourselves haven't felt terrible troubles yet in our lives, we have met those who have. We are often left speechless when we hear what they must suffer. It is at such times when we feel that no rescue can help. Our hearts become fearful, and we feel weak and helpless. "Will God's rescue come? Will he come to save?"

Don't expect to find a comforting answer from this world. The enemies of God will tell you, "Why are you so sure that God will come to rescue you. How can you know?" Satan's lies attack us, "Are you sure God still loves you? Hasn't he abandoned you?" Things have not changed! The Assyrian ambassador that approached the besieged city of Jerusalem mocked, "How can the Lord deliver Jerusalem from my hand?" The apostle Peter reminded us that this will go on, "*In the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, 'Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.'*" (2 Peter 3:3-4)

Our response to this taunt can sometimes be weakness, fear, and silence. And we ourselves in our weakness will see others who suffer earthly troubles. But instead of being a Christian friend or neighbor, we sometimes can cease to speak up. Sometimes by our very silence to those who suffer we might say, "I'm not so sure God will act to save." Instead of putting down the fear we only spread it. They remain fearful and weak as we remain silent. God's enemies sometimes then feel they have won the last word. And that's true. God's enemies do get the last word if his people all remain silent in the face of suffering.

How could we stay silent when we know how great that suffering becomes? The sufferings of this world are terrible and real. But Isaiah spoke of things far greater than earthly troubles! The plight of this world does not merely end with earthly troubles! People like to think that there is no hell and punishment for sin and that the Lord will not punish other religions because they all rely on the same God. Both are lies. Isaiah tells of God's eternal wrath for all nations. Isaiah chapter 34 describes not just the physical destruction of his enemies, but the eternal punishment of hell. A terrible picture of judgment is depicted with God's sword of judgment stained with the blood of God's enemies. Hell is real. It is not just an invention of man. Isaiah says God's enemies will be burned in a flame which "*will not be quenched*

night and day; its smoke will rise forever." If God does not act to save, this fate remains on all nations, all people. If God does not act to save, those who taunt "God will not act to save you" are right. Then we would forever remain in fear and weakness -doomed to face far more than earthly suffering!

But Isaiah would not remain silent among those who suffered! While Satan and all God's enemies would love us to become fearful and weak, Isaiah made known the truth. God's Word stand before us today in Isaiah chapter 35: *"Say to those with fearful hearts 'Be strong! Do not fear!' Why? 'Your God will come, he will come... he will come."*

At the coming of God two things are foretold: Firstly, *divine retribution*. This is God's payback. It is vengeance that is just and holy. This is his punishment for sin and rebellion against him. This is for all God's enemies. All those who taunt and mock God will meet their end. This included the Assyrians and Babylonians with their relatively short empires. Secondly, he will save and bring restoration! He did this for the people of Jerusalem and restored the city. Just as he promised that Assyrian army was crushed. The city was spared. When you speak God's Word, you speak the truth.

But God's coming to act on our behalf didn't end there! Isaiah makes it clear who is coming: God himself. God came in a way that all would marvel who saw and believed. He came! He took on human flesh and came to his creation in the most personal way. Our God came in the flesh! Jesus is the one who fulfills this prophecy! He is the one who came with divine retribution, to destroy God's enemies. Recall John the Baptizers description of Jesus *"His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."* (Matthew 3:12) He is the one who fulfills this prophecy about bringing miraculous healing! Isaiah said the Savior to come would come, *"to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness."* (Is 42:7) Jesus himself read from Isaiah and said, *"I fulfill these words."* Just as foretold, the Messiah would come, *"Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy."* Recall how Jesus healed the lepers and the healed leaped for and shouted for joy as the Holy One of Israel healed and restored! The words of Isaiah had to echo in the minds of some who were in that crowd with Jesus as he healed the people, *"Your God will come... your God will come."* God's promise through Isaiah wasn't empty! It was kept!

And his ultimate reason for coming still echoes around the world: *"He will come to save you!"* Jesus came into the world for this very reason, *to save*. When he came and lived as a man his mission was *"not to condemn the world, but to save the world."* We needed salvation from the grave and the pits of hell. God's divine justice for sin would not be set aside. Yet in his great love God would not just have the sinner die. Instead, he sent a Savior. He gave his Son to die in our place. And the Son of God came in human flesh, he came to save. His salvation came as he took our place on the cross. God's divine vengeance on sin is no longer rests on us but is covered by Jesus. Our God came to save us!

And he will come again! He now lives victorious. He is ruling over all things on his throne. And he promised to come again to save us! The living Jesus declared victory over all his enemies. This includes Satan and all demons and all who strive against the church. So, we confess, *"He will come again to judge the living and the dead."* God's divine justice will be carried out and all we will be able to do is stand and marvel at the mercy of our God who pardoned all our sins for the sake of Jesus!

When he comes again, we know that he will bring complete restoration for us! Isaiah describes the restoration the Savior will bring when he comes: *"Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy."* This restoration will reach completion when Jesus sits on his divine throne and declares, *"Behold, I make all things new!"* Then our bodies will be transformed to be like his glorious body. The cancer: gone. The announcement that we only have so long left: replaced with eternity! The sore, or unusable joint: restored to perfection so that you can leap like a deer! Those who died or barely survived a car wreck: alive and well in Christ! This is the rescue Jesus won for us and the restoration he brings!

All this is freely given! Isaiah doesn't say, *"Find your God."* He doesn't say, *"Live right and receive God."* No. *"Say to those with fearful hearts, your God will come."* He has come to save and restore! Our fear disappears as we take to heart God's saving action of sending Jesus. We are strong because we know and believe he lives and rules over all things and will restore us to life eternal! Satan's taunts are silenced even in our worst earthly sufferings! *"He will come... he will come! My God will act to save and restore!"*

This is why we speak to those with fearful hearts, *"Do not be fearful, Be strong!"* When we see a Christian brother or sister suffering earthly troubles, we do not have to be silent. We are told to remind them who might become fearful and weak to *"Be strong! Do not fear!"* Why? We remind them of Jesus coming and promise to return! Your God will come! Don't let the sickness, the suffering, the car wreck, house fire, don't let any trouble wreck your reliance on God! He will act to save! To all those around us who are suffering earthly troubles we speak, *"Take heart. Let me tell you about what my God has done! He has come to save!"* We tell them what Jesus has done. *"He will come to restore!"* We tell them what Jesus will continue to do for them. You don't have to say much, brothers and sisters in Christ. But do speak up and say to those with fearful hearts, *"Do not fear, be strong, your God will come before long!"*